A MODEL OF DOWNWARD ABUSIVE COMMUNICATION: EXPLORING RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN COGNITIVE COMPLEXITY, DOWNWARD COMMUNICATIVE ADAPTABILITY, AND DOWNWARD ABUSIVE COMMUNICATION

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A

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Abstract

A model was proposed to understand the antecedents of abusive supervision. Relationships were explored between cognitive complexity, downward communicative adaptability, and downward abusive communication. Superiors from various organizations were asked to take an online survey which measured superiors' cognitive complexity, downward communicative adaptability and abusive supervision. There was no evidence to support H1, which linked cognitive complexity to downward communicative adaptability, but there was evidence for H2, which stated that downward communicative adaptability was negatively correlated with downward abusive communication. The RCQ proved to be reliable but its validity was questioned in the present study which is why H1 may not have been supported.

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Chapter 1 Theory and Research

1.1 Abusive Supervision

According to Tepper, Moss, and Duffy (2011), 13% of American workers have experienced abusive supervision, a phenomenon that Tepper, Moss, Lockhart, and Carr (2007) described as "ridiculing, undermining, and yelling at subordinates [yielding]… a source of chronic stress that produces serious negative consequences" (p. 1172). Examples of abusive supervision include public denigration, explosive outbursts, rude remarks, embarrassment of an employee, the silent treatment, rude non-verbal behaviors, aggressive eye contact, and threats to employees that they will lose their job (Tepper, 2000; Tepper et al., 2007). Abusive supervision has many potential negative mental and physical effects, including problem drinking (Bamberger & Bacharach, 2006), psychological distress and insomnia (Rafferty, Restubog, & Jimmieson 2010), lower job and life satisfaction (Tepper, 2000), depression and emotional exhaustion (Yagil, 2006), employee aggression (Burton & Hoobler, 2011), increased turnover (Tepper, 2000), and less meaningfully interpreted work (Rafferty & Restbog, 2011).

Not only does abusive supervision negatively affect the employee, but it also has been shown to have harmful effects on personal relationships. For example, Carlson, Furguson, Perrewé, and Whitten (2011) found that employees who faced abusive supervision were more likely to report an overall lower level of family functioning. Similarly, Hoobler and Brass (2006) found "that subordinates who perceived higher levels of abusive supervision had family members who perceived higher levels of undermining [from the subordinate] at home" (p. 1130). All of these problems have

likely generated increased emotional and financial costs for employees and their organizations. Therefore, it is important that we learn more about the causes of abusive supervision.

In the present study, I propose a new model of abusive supervision (see Figure 1). According to the model, superiors with low levels of cognitive complexity are likely to have low levels of downward communicative adaptability. In turn, superiors with low levels of downward communicative adaptability are likely to exhibit downward abusive communication. Downward abusive communication does not take into account others' feeling or goals because of the lack of adaption. Those superiors with lower cognitive complexity will have less of an ability to adapt their communication and will be more likely to engage in abusive supervision.

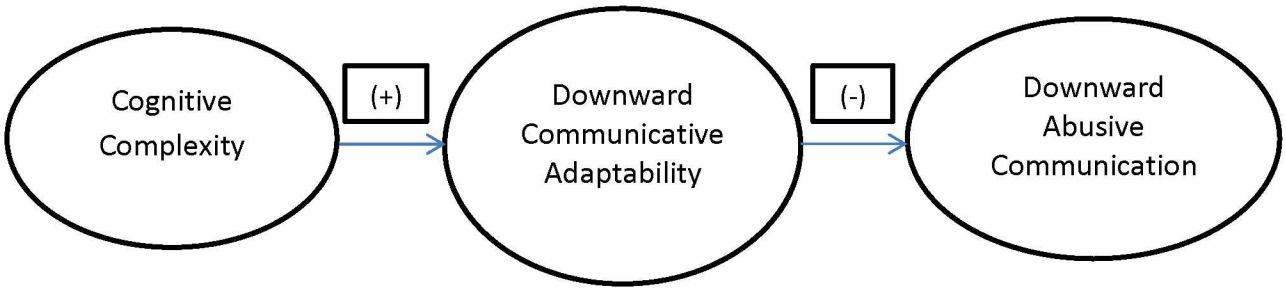

Figure 1. Illustration of the hypothesized relationships between Cognitive Complexity, Downward Communicative Adaptability, and Downward Abusive Communication

1.2 Cognitive Complexity

1.2.1 Constructs. Constructs are the basic cognitive structures through which we perceive and understand the social world. A construct is a bipolar continuum such as "happy/sad" or "good/bad" (Kelly, 1955, p. 59). Individuals use a set of constructs to evaluate and interpret others (Kelly, 1955). Constructs help us make sense of an overwhelming amount of information that we are bombarded with constantly. They enable life to become more predictable in that one can refer back to these construct-based interpretations, but can also edit them when necessary (Delia, O'Keefe, & O'Keefe, 1982).

1.2.2 Cognitive Complexity. In social perception, humans are attempting to understand other humans; who they are, what they are doing, what their intentions are as well as their personal qualities in order to categorize them efficiently (Delia et al., 1982). Cognitive complexity is an information processing variable of social perception (Delia et al., 1982), and consists of the complexity of one's construct system (Wood, 2012). According to Wood (2012),

> People differ in the number and types of knowledge schema that they use to organize and interpret people and situations. Cognitive complexity refers to the number of constructs used, how abstract they are, and how elaborately they interact to shape perceptions. (p. 40)

More cognitively complex individuals have more constructs to choose from and are constantly adjusting and taking note of details to refine their construct-based interpretations (Delia et al., 1982). Less cognitively complex individuals have fewer

constructs, and are less likely to update their construct-based interpretations (Delia et al., 1982). Individuals with higher levels of cognitive complexity are better able than those with lower levels of complexity to acquire, store, retrieve, organize, and generate information about other people and social situations (Delia et al., 1982).

1.2.3 Effects of Cognitive Complexity. Cognitive complexity affects human interaction in a variety of ways, including relational compatibility (Adams-Webber, 2001; Burleson & Samter, 1996), interpersonal problem solving (Karney & Gauer, 2010), decoding grief-related messages (Bodie et al., 2011), and perceptual differentiation (Dierdorff & Rubin, 2007; Domangue, 1978; Reid & Foels, 2010; Tripodi & Bieri, 1966).

1.2.3.1 Relational Compatibility. According to Kelly's (1955) sociality corollary, a similar level of constructs needs to be achieved to communicate with others successfully. That is, a similar level of constructs needs to be achieved individually to "maintain sociality," or to "construe the constructions" (Kelly, 1955, p. 35) of a partner. Consistent with Kelly's claim, Adams-Webber (2001) found that members of an established couple were more likely to have similar levels of cognitive complexity than members of non-established couples. Similarly, Burleson and Samter (1996) found that individuals in platonic relationships preferred to interact with others with similar levels of cognitive complexity. They pointed out that regardless of the level of cognitive complexity, the matching of levels was what was important in friendship.

1.2.3.2 Interpersonal Problem Solving. Karney and Gauer (2010) studied how new couples handled relational problems. They found that the more cognitively complex a couple was on average, the more effective they were at finding a solution to marital

problems. Among the newlywed couples, the effectiveness of a problem-solving discussion was limited by the boundaries of the less complex spouse. That is, the spouse who was more cognitively complex was the one who had to make more adjustments and compromises for his or her less cognitively complex spouse (Karney & Gauer, 2010).

1.2.3.3 Perceptual Differentiation. Cognitive complexity has also been linked to perceptual differentiation. For example, Dierdorff and Rubin (2007) found that employees with high levels of cognitive complexity made more accurate assessments of their work-related roles in both frequency and importance than those with lower levels of cognitive complexity. In a study on the decoding of grief related messages, Bodie et al. (2011) found that the more cognitively complex a grieving individual was, the more he or she paid attention to the content and detail of grief-relief messages. Additionally, Domangue (1978) discovered that individuals with higher levels of cognitive complexity were more likely to catch inconsistencies between a speaker's verbal and nonverbal communication than those with lower levels of cognitive complexity. Moreover, Reid and Foels (2010) found that the more cognitively complex the individual was, the more attuned he or she was to subtle hints of racism. Lastly, Tripodi and Bieri (1966) found that highly cognitively complex individuals were more likely to be less certain of their judgments when conflicting information was presented. They found an opposite pattern for less cognitively complex individuals in that they were more certain of their judgments when presented with conflicting information.

1.3 Communicative Adaptability

According to Duran (1983), communicative adaptability is "the ability to perceive socio-interpersonal relationships and adapt one's interaction goals and behaviors accordingly" (p. 320). An individual that scores high in communicative adaptability is often described as witty, comes across as supportive and relaxed, enjoys meeting and interacting with new people, and monitors the appropriateness of his or her disclosures and verbal behavior (Duran, 1992). Additionally, a communicator who is high in communicative adaptability is proficient at self-monitoring his or her communication behavior, adapting his or her communication to address his or her own and the other party's goals, and adapting his or her communication to different communication contexts (Duran, 1983).

Duran (1992) developed a scale to measure communicative adaptability. The Communicative Adaptability Scale measures six dimensions:

> (1) social experience, which assesses affect for and participation in varied social settings; (2) social confirmation, which taps maintenance of the other's projected social image; (3) social composure, which measures the degree to which one feels relaxed in social situations; (4) appropriate disclosure, which assesses sensitivity to the intimacy level of social exchanges; (5) articulation, which measures the appropriateness of one's syntax and semantics; and (6) wit, which taps the use of humor to diffuse social tension. (p. 259)

1.3.1 Effects of Communicative Adaptability. There have been various research studies that have examined the effects of communicative adaptability on interpersonal

attraction (Burleson & Samter, 1996), friendship formation (Gareis, Merkin, & Jeffrey, 2013), and conflict management (Schumacher, 1997).

1.3.1.1 Interpersonal Attraction. In a 1996 study, Burleson and Samter investigated the effects of partners' levels of communicative adaptability on their interpersonal attraction. They found that individuals were attracted to others with approximately the same level of communicative adaptability as themselves.

1.3.1.2 Friendship Formation. According to Gareis, Merkin, and Goldman (2011), international exchange students that come to the United States often complain of a lack of connection and friendship with host-nationals. They found that an exchange student's communicative adaptability was positively related to his or her number and quality of friends.

1.3.1.3 Conflict Management. Schumacher (1997) investigated the effects of subordinates' approaches to conflict in the workplace and their ability to effectively adapt their communication. Schumacher found that individuals who scored higher in communicative adaptability were more likely to use non-confrontational strategies (i.e., avoiding or downplaying the issue). In contrast, Schumacher (1997) found that subordinates who scored lower on communicative adaptability were more likely to use control strategies to resolve their conflict because they felt it was their only option.

1.4 Linking Cognitive Complexity to Communicative Adaptability

Burleson (2007) found that high levels of cognitive complexity were linked with sophisticated message production. According Dillard (2004), to produce a sophisticated

message, an individual needs to have the ability to follow the goals-action-plans model (GPA model) of interpersonal influence.

In the GPA model, the first element to consider is goals. Goals are "future states of affairs that an individual is committed to achieving or maintaining" (Dillard, 2004, p. 2). Goals are split up into primary goals and secondary goals depending on their level of importance (Dillard, 2004). For example, a student's primary goal may be to get a grade changed, but his or her secondary goal may be to keep a good relationship with his or her professor (Sager, 2013). The student will keep both of these goals in mind when developing their plan (Sager, 2013). Goals stimulate the next element of the model: plans. Plans are "cognitive representations of the behavior that are entities, actions that exist in the world" (Dillard, 2004). For example, a student will want to plan how he or she will interact with his or her instructor to accomplish the primary goal (grade change) as well as the secondary goal (to maintain a good relationship) (Sager, 2013).

For the above plan, the individual will likely consider how he or she will be assertive as well as kind so that he or she can accomplish both goals (Sager, 2013). To do so, the individual must refer to his or her "procedural records" (Dillard, 2004). These records are our mental notes of actions that have been taken in the past paired with their outcomes (Dillard, 2004). An individual chooses his or her plan by referring to noted procedural records to find a close fit or similar situation. Plans are followed by actions. Actions are the behaviors that are enacted by following the "plans" that were decided in the previous step of the GPA model (Dillard, 2004). This is when the student from the

example would go interact with his or her instructor and put the plan to work (Sager, 2013).

Sophisticated message production is conceptually similar to communicative adaptability. According to Duran (1983), communicative adaptability is "the ability to perceive socio-interpersonal relationships and adapt one's interaction goals and behaviors accordingly" (p. 320). In both sophisticated message production and communicative adaptability, it is important to consider the goals of the interaction and decide on a plan that would best be able to accomplish them. Because cognitive complexity has been linked to sophisticated messages production (Burleson, 2007), it is likely that cognitive complexity would also be related to communicative adaptability.

1.5 Abusive Supervision

Abusive supervision has historically referred to "subordinates' perceptions of the extent to which their supervisors engage in sustained display of hostile, verbal and non-verbal behaviors excluding physical contact" (Tepper, 2000, p. 178). In terms of specific behaviors, abusive supervision includes rude remarks, employee embarrassment, the silent treatment, rude non-verbal behaviors directed at an employee, aggressive eye contact, and threats of jobs loss (Tepper, 2000). Petty tyranny is a conceptual cousin of abusive supervision. According to Ashforth (1994) the petty tyrant is "an individual that lords his or her power over others" (p. 772). According to Ashforth elements of petty tyranny include being distrustful, suspicious, condescending, ridged, and inflexible. Ashforth states that abusive superiors make arbitrary decisions, take credit for others,

blame others for their own mistakes, fail to consult with others, and emphasize their authority and status difference over their subordinates.

1.5.1 Individual Difference Variables as Causes of Abusive Supervision.

Researchers have investigated several individual difference variables as potential causes of abusive supervision including personality characteristics (Neuman & Baron, 1998; Ashforth, 1997), demographic characteristics (Douglas & Martinko, 2001; Dupré & Barling, 2006; and Ng and Feldman, 2008), and supervisors' beliefs (Ashforth, 1997; Hoobler & Brass, 2006).

1.5.1.1 Personality Characteristics. Neuman and Baron (1998) found that individuals that fall into the "Type A" personality pattern were more likely to lose their temper, showed more aggression, and engaged in more conflict at work than those with a "Type B" personality pattern. Moreover, the trait of neuroticism accompanied by a "Type A" personality pattern yielded more aggressive tendencies than neuroticism paired with a "Type B" personality pattern. Neuman and Baron also found that individuals with high negative affectivity had an increased probability of aggression. Ashforth (1997) discovered that petty tyranny was negatively related to a manager's tolerance to ambiguity.

1.5.1.2 Demographic Characteristics. Dupré and Barling (2006) found that males engaged in more workplace aggression than females, however other studies showed no differences (Douglas and Martinko, 2001). Lastly, Ng and Feldman (2008) found that older workers (i.e., workers 40 years of age and older) were less likely to engage in workplace aggression.

1.5.1.3 Supervisors' Beliefs. One set of supervisor beliefs is known as the "psychological contract" (Hoobler & Brass, 2006). A psychological contract consists of rights that an employee may feel they are entitled to even if it is not formalized in a handbook, or policy. Hoobler and Brass (2006) found that when a supervisor reported that he or she had his or her psychological contract violated, higher levels of abusive supervision were reported by their subordinates. Another set of supervisor beliefs is referred to as Theory X. According to McGregor (1960) individuals that adhere to Theory X beliefs believe that a manager needs to control and direct subordinates, otherwise the subordinates will be passive or resistant to their duties. Ashforth (1997) found that the average of two subordinates' ratings for their mutual supervisor correlated positively with their supervisor's Theory X beliefs.

1.6 Linking Communicative Adaptability to Abusive Supervision

The link between communicative adaptability and abusive supervision has yet to be researched but the relationship between communicative adaptability and supportive communication is a clue to how these two variables could be related.

In the field of supportive communication, comforting messages can be categorized into different levels of "person-centeredness" (Burleson & Caplan, 1998, p. 249). Person-centeredness is the extent to which messages reflect "an awareness of an adaptation to the subject, affective, and relational aspects of communicative contexts" (Burleson & Caplan, 1998, p. 249). Comforting messages low in person-centeredness can deny the other person's feelings, challenge the legitimacy of the other's feelings, and even indicate how the other should feel. Comforting messages high in person-

centeredness acknowledge and legitimize the other person's feelings as well as elaborate on reasons why the person feels that way. Highly person centered messages are listener-centered, emotionally-focused and non-judgmental. People who are effective in creating comforting messages have been found to be more likeable, attractive, and accepted by their peers (Burleson, 2003).

As downward communicative adaptability decreases, person-centeredness is likely to decrease because there is minimal or no adaption in the message creation process. As person-centeredness decreases, downward abusive communication is likely to increase because the lack of differentiation or adaption in the message content will most likely not be construed as taking into consideration the other party's feelings and goals. Therefore, as downward communicative adaptability decreases, it is likely that downward abusive communication will increase because there is minimal, if any, individualized, humanizing communication in downward abusive communication.

1.7 Hypotheses

Individuals with high levels of cognitive complexity have construct systems that contain not only more constructs but more sophisticated constructs than those with low levels of cognitive complexity (Wood, 2012). Consequently, individuals high in cognitive complexity are better able to differentiate individuals' unique characteristics, (Wood, 2012) which, in turn, makes it more likely that they will be able to identify and display appropriate communication behaviors. Based on this research, I advance the following hypothesis:

H1: There is a significant positive correlation between an individual's cognitive complexity and his or her downward communicative adaptability.

Individuals with high levels of communicative adaptability are better able to adapt their communication behaviors by using high person-centered communication. Superiors do not adapt constructively when they engage in abusive behaviors, which are low person-centered messages (Burleson, 2003).

H2: There is a significant negative correlation between an individual's level of downward communicative adaptability and his or her likelihood of engaging in abusive supervision.

Chapter 2 Research Methodology

2.1 Participants

The sample consisted of 173 superiors. Of the 173 superiors, 84 were female, 84 were male, and 5 did not report their sex. All participants were at least 18 years old and ranged from 18– 74 years of age (M = 39.19, SD = 14.34). The ethnic composition of the superiors was as follows: White, non-Hispanic (83.8%); Alaska Native (4%); Multi-Racial (4%); Hispanic (2.3%); Black/African-American (1.7%); Asian (1.2%); and Pacific Islander (.6%). The superiors worked in a variety of different sized departments (M = 49.19, SD = 136.70), and the number of employees under each superior varied (M = 13.62, SD = 24.91). The surveys were administered in the spring of 2013. A convenience sample was used to collect data. Organizations were contacted and asked to send a mass e-mail to all superiors (managers and supervisors) in their organization with a link to the survey.

2.2 Procedures

Organizations were contacted and asked to participate in the study by sending a mass e-mail to all of their managers and supervisors. The e-mail message included a link to the online consent form and survey items. Participants' e-mails were collected at the end of the survey (they were decoupled from participant input) and 5 randomly drawn Amazon.com gift cards were raffled off. Survey responses were automatically entered in into an SPSS data file and statistically analyzed.

2.3 Measures

Crockett's (1965) two-peer version of the Role Category Questionnaire was used to measure cognitive complexity. Duran's (1983) Communicative Adaptability Scale was adapted to measure downward communicative adaptability from a supervisor's or manager's perspective, and the content of Tepper's (2000) Abusive Supervision Scale was reviewed to create a new measure of downward abusive communication assessed from the manager's or supervisor's perspective.

2.3.1 Cognitive Complexity. Crockett's (1965) two-peer Role Category Questionnaire (RCQ) is a measure of cognitive complexity, which is based on a person's construct differentiation. In the present study, participants were asked to think of two people their own age that they know well: one that they liked, and one that they disliked. They were then asked to spend no more than five minutes to describe each person. The RCQ instructions asked participants to type a list of personal characteristics such as mannerisms, habits, beliefs, as well as other similar ways to describe the person that they liked and disliked (Crockett, 1965).

The online survey contained a five minute timer so that participants would be aware of the elapsed time. Participants were not required to take the full five minutes, so they were not prevented from moving on to the next section of the survey if they finished before the five minutes had elapsed. A high number of constructs on the RCQ indicates high cognitive complexity (Burleson, Waltman, & Tardy, 1988). To calculate an individual's score on the RCQ in the present study, responses were coded separately for

the number of individual constructs. O'Keefe and And (1982) obtained a test-retest reliability coefficient of .86 on the RCQ. In the present study, a correlation coefficient was calculated to determine the extent of the inter-rater reliability, which was very high, $r = .999, p < .001$.

2.3.2 Downward Communicative Adaptability. Duran's (1983) Communicative Adaptability scale (CAS) is a self-report 30 item survey consisting of six dimensions:

> 1.) Social experience- assesses affect in different social settings; 2.) social confirmation – maintenance of the other's social image; 3.) social composure – measures the level of relaxation one feels in a social setting' 4.) appropriate disclosure – evaluates sensitivity of intimacy in social exchanges; 5.) articulation- the appropriateness of one's syntax and semantics; 6.) wit – using humor to diffuse social tension. (p. 259)

Based on ten samples, the average alpha reliabilities for the CAS dimensions were: Social Experience, .80; Social Confirmation, .84; Social Composure, .82; Appropriate Disclosure, .76; Articulation, .80; and Wit, .74 (Duran, 1992). A high score on the CAS indicates a high level of communicative adaptability. Duran (1983) found that the content validity was also adequate. The CAS was adapted to focus on downward communicative adaptability of superiors to subordinates. The adapted scale was named the Sager and Wallace (2012b) Downward Communicative Adaptability Scale. The calculated reliability for the Downward Communicative Adaptability Scale was alpha = .72.

The Downward Communicative Adaptability Scale consisted of 30 items, which were answered on a 9-point Likert-type scale. The number 1 referred to "Never" and nine referred to "Always." "When I am talking with an employee, I think about how the employee feels" and "I am verbally and non-verbally supportive of individual employees" are two examples of items from the Downward Communicative Adaptability Scale (Sager & Wallace, 2012b, p. 2).

2.3.3 Downward Abusive Communication. Tepper's (2000) Abusive Supervision Scale is a 15-item scale used to measure abusive supervision from an employee's perspective on a 5-point Likert-type scale. A high score indicates a high level of abusive supervision. In a 2000 study, Tepper found the internal consistency reliability to be .90. The Abusive Supervision Scale was used as a basis to create the Sager and Wallace (2012a) Downward Abusive Communication Scale which measures abusive communication from the superior's perspective. In the present study, the internal consistency reliability coefficient was alpha = .82. In addition to the need to have superiors report on their own behavior, Tepper's (2000) Abusive Supervision Scale also needed to be adapted because of the social desirability factor that comes with admitting that one has participated in behaviors falling into the category of abusive supervision.

Sager and Wallace's (2012b) Downward Communicative Adaptability Scale consisted of 15 items on a Likert-type scale of 1 to 9. A 9-point Likert-type scale was used to allow for more variation in responses due to the social desirability bias of not reporting abusive behaviors. The number 1 referred to "NEVER" and 9 referred to

"ALWAYS." "I interrupt individual employees when they are speaking" and "I honor the agreements that I make with individual employees" are two examples of items from the Downward Abusive Communication Scale (Sager & Wallace, 2012a, p. 2). The second item in the example would be reverse scored.

Chapter 3 Results

3.1 Correlational Analysis

Two tailed correlations were calculated to test both H1 and H2. Correlations were tested with two-tailed alpha set at .05.

3.1.1 Linking Cognitive Complexity with Downward Communicative Adaptability.

H1 was not supported. There was a no significant positive relationship between cognitive complexity and downward communicative adaptability ($r = .06, p = .432$). A scatterplot depicting this result is presented in Appendix A.

3.1.2 Linking Downward Communicative Adaptability and Downward Abusive Communication.

H2 was supported. There was a significant negative correlation between downward communicative adaptability and downward abusive communication ($r = -.40, p < .001$). A scatterplot depicting this result is presented in Appendix B.

Chapter 4 Discussion

Downward abusive supervision is a phenomenon that occurs in the workplace when a superior is communicatively abusive to his or her subordinates (Tepper et al., 2007). Such abuse is problematic for organizational functioning and is associated with poor health and wellness reports from abused subordinates (Bamberger & Bacharach, 2006; Burton & Hoobler, 2011; Rafferty et al., 2010; Rafferty & Restbog, 2011; Tepper, 2000; Yagil, 2006). To effectively manage abusive supervision, it is crucial to understand the antecedents of abusive supervision.

A model of downward abusive communication was proposed. In the present study, cognitive complexity was hypothesized to be positively related to downward communicative adaptability. I reasoned that those with higher cognitive complexity would be better able to differentiate the unique qualities of an individual, and be more likely to create a message specifically tailored for that individual.

Downward communicative adaptability was hypothesized to be negatively related to downward abusive communication. Here, I reasoned that individuals with low levels of downward communicative adaptability would be more likely to engage in downward abusive communication. As downward communicative adaptability decreases, person-centeredness is likely to decrease. As person-centeredness decreases, downward abusive communication is likely to increase because the lack of differentiation or adaption in the message content will most likely not be construed as taking into consideration the other party's feelings and goals.

An online survey was constructed to measure superiors' self-reported cognition and behavior. The RCQ (Crockett, 1965) measured cognitive complexity by measuring the number of constructs a participant typed out in five minutes. Duran's (1983) Communicative Adaptability Scale was adapted to superiors in the workplace, and transformed into the Sager and Wallace (2012b) Downward Communicative Adaptability Scale. Lastly, Tepper's (2000) Abusive Supervision Scale was used as a basis for creating the Sager and Wallace (2012a) Downward Abusive Communication Scale. Data were gathered using a convenience sample by asking organizations to forward an e-mail to superiors at any level in their organization.

The hypothesis that linked cognitive complexity to downward communicative adaptability was not supported. However, downward communicative adaptability was significantly negatively correlated with downward abusive communication.

In the current study, the main limitation was the use of the RCQ as the measure of cognitive complexity. Beatty and Payne (1984) questioned the issue of loquacity--the higher the number of constructs always earns a higher score on the RCQ without taking into account how elaborately one's constructs interact together. Beatty and Payne (1984) proposed that what the RCQ was specifically measuring social perspectives rather than cognitive complexity. They found a high positive correlation between an individual's scores on the RCQ and his or her score on the Social Perspectives Task. This led them to conclude that the RCQ more accurately measured perception, and is not a valid measure of cognitive complexity.

Accounting for how elaborately the constructs interact is what needs to be measured to capture a score of one's cognitive complexity. In Kelly's (1955) personal construct theory, social interaction "depends on an ongoing pattern of behavior that follows from a person's understanding of how the others who are associated with him in his task think" (pp. 97-98). An individual may be very perceptive at picking up details, but have low cognitive complexity by the way he or she interprets and utilizes his or her cognitive constructs.

With the strong support that H2 received, it is reasonable to conclude that those superiors who are better able to adapt their communication to their subordinates are less likely to be abusive communicatively. Theoretically, the ability to adapt one's own communication changes the direction of the ongoing pattern of behavior. This is very beneficial when considering communication goals such as persuasion.

On the basis of this research, abusive superiors will be less likely to adapt their communication to their subordinates causing a wake of issues. To avoid this disastrous wake, an organization could consider this finding in their hiring processes. Questions that assess downward communicative adaptability in an interview or a self-report measure may be of interest to potential employers of possible management hires.

There were several limitations to the study, however. The main limitation was using the RCQ to measure cognitive complexity. Beatty and Payne (1984) do not believe that the RCQ measures cognitive complexity, but that it instead measures perception. Rather than measuring how constructs work together and interact, the RCQ mainly

measures the sheer volume of constructs (Beatty & Payne, 1984). In addition, a larger sample size would have been more ideal. It proved to be a challenge to find organizations willing to administer the survey. There was also a social desirability bias in that the survey asked participants to divulge information that would not shed them in the best light. While this must be taken into account when looking at the results, it is obvious that many participants were admitting to behaviors that are often viewed as less than positive. The self-report nature of the scales also served to be problematic. An individual may not accurately (consciously or unconsciously) report their behaviors. One final limitation was that this study did not statistically control for demographic variables such as biological sex and age.

To combat some of the self-report and social desirability issues, in future studies, researchers could observe and code communication events in organizations. Additionally, a different measure of cognitive complexity could be tested with downward communicative adaptability to see if there is a correlation.

The findings of this study suggest that superiors that engage in abusive communication are less likely to adapt their communication to subordinates. This could be because supervisors choose not to, or because superiors simply cannot adapt their communication. If superiors are choosing not to adapt their communication, it leads me to conclude that these abusive superiors do not treat their subordinates as individual human beings with different goals and thoughts. If superiors cannot adapt their communication, I conclude that they are lacking in an extremely important element of

successful human interaction, which may reduce their ability to function successfully in a position of authority. Abusive superiors have many negative effects on their subordinates (e.g., Bamberger & Bacharach, 2006; Burton & Hoobler, 2011) and reducing downward abusive communication would benefit both organizations and their employees.

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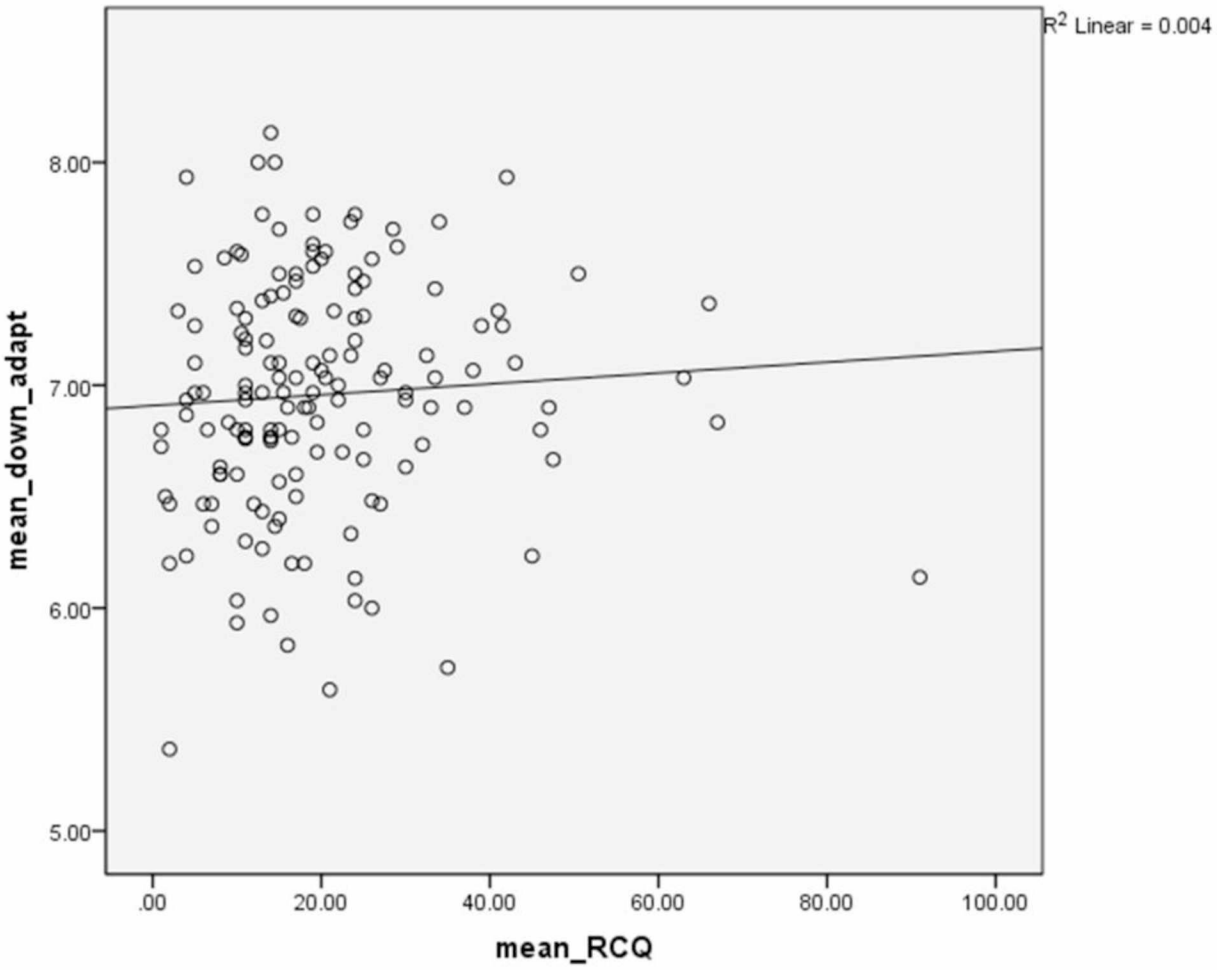
Appendix A

Linking cognitive complexity to downward communicative adaptability

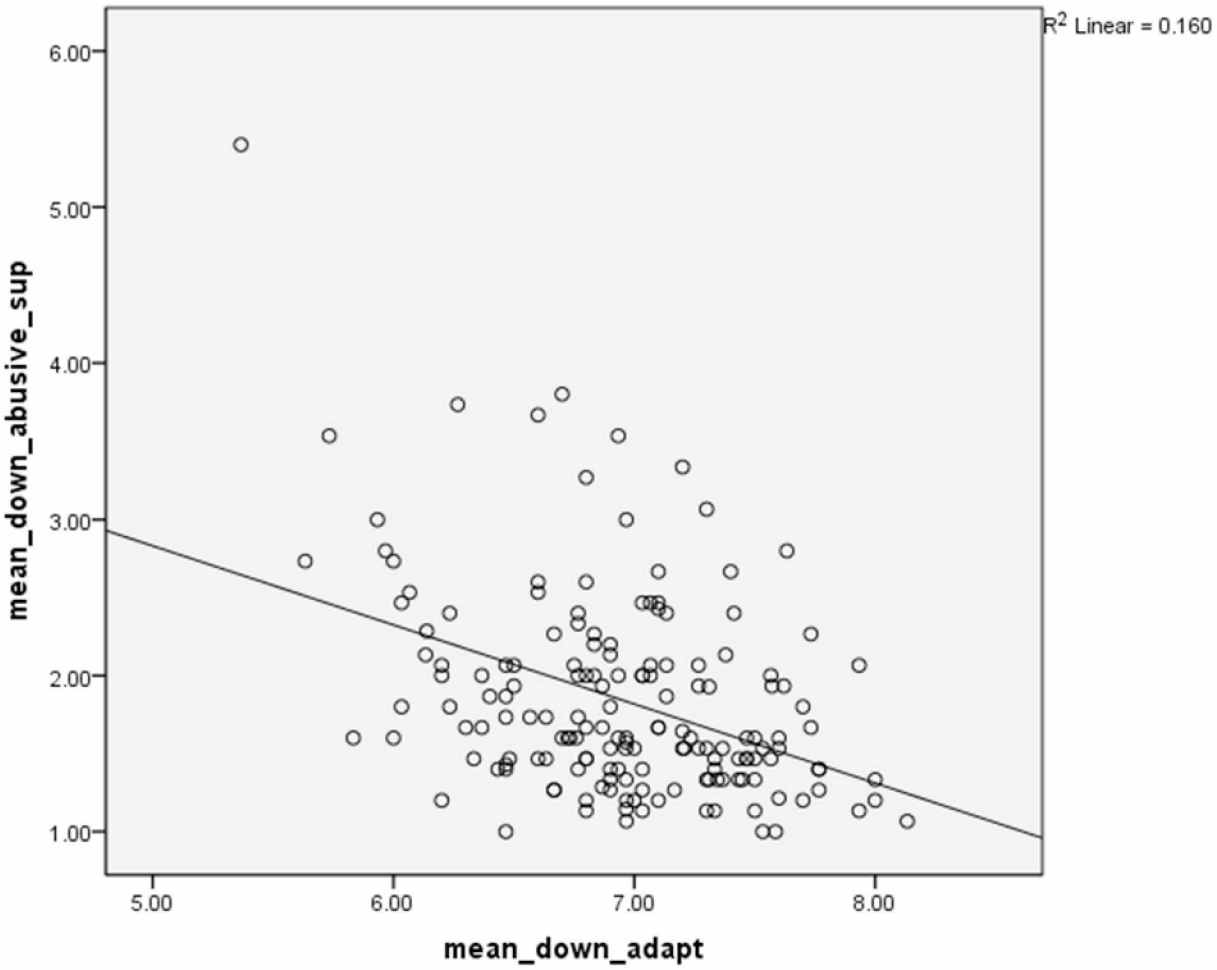
In a two-tailed correlational test, there was a no significant relationship between cognitive complexity and downward communicative adaptability (r = .06, p = .432).



Appendix B

Linking downward communicative adaptability to downward abusive communication

In a two-tailed correlational test, there was a significant negative correlation between downward communicative adaptability and downward abusive communication (r = - .40, p < .001).



Appendix C

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Institutional Review Board

909 N Koyukuk Dr. Suite 212, P.O. Box 757270, Fairbanks, Alaska 99775-7270

December 4, 2012

To: Kevin Sager, B. S., M. S. Ed., Ph. D.
Principal Investigator

From: University of Alaska Fairbanks IRB

Re: [401858-1] Exploring relationships among superiors' thoughts, feelings, and communication behaviors

Thank you for submitting the New Project referenced below. The submission was handled by Exempt Review. The Office of Research Integrity has determined that the proposed research qualifies for exemption from the requirements of 45 CFR 46. This exemption does not waive the researchers' responsibility to adhere to basic ethical principles for the responsible conduct of research and discipline specific professional standards.

Title:	Exploring relationships among superiors' thoughts, feelings, and communication behaviors
Received:	November 29, 2012
Exemption Category:	*2*
Effective Date:	December 4, 2012

This action is included on the December 6, 2012 IRB Agenda.

Please add ORI toll free number to consent for participants to contact the university.

Prior to making substantive changes to the scope of research, research tools, or personnel involved on the project, please contact the Office of Research Integrity to determine whether or not additional review is required. Additional review is not required for small editorial changes to improve the clarity or readability of the research tools or other documents.